

Testimony of Bruce Clouette
Re: Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism
Appropriations Committee
February 17, 2009

Hon. Members of the Committee:

I appear here tonight to call your attention to the effects of the proposed budget cutbacks/reorganization on the functioning of the State Historic Preservation Office, one of the components of the Commission on Culture and Tourism. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) reviews all federally funded and licensed projects for their effects on historic buildings, historic districts, and archaeological sites as part of the environmental-impact analysis for the projects. Under federal law, no federally supported project in Connecticut can proceed without the review of the SHPO.

The proposal before you would reduce the number of SHPO staff members presently working on project review from two to one and would reorganize the SHPO into the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). This represents false economy because

- The eliminated position is federally funded, so there would be no reduction in the state's deficit.
- The work load for SHPO project review can be expected to increase dramatically in the near future with the influx of federal stimulus funds. In order for Connecticut to use these funds expeditiously, the state needs to maintain or even increase its ability to conduct efficient project review, not cut it in half.
- Combining the SHPO with DECD may result in long-term efficiencies and savings, but in the short term any reorganization will almost certainly create disruptions that will reduce the SHPO's ability to conduct timely review. At a time when the states will be competing for federal assistance, Connecticut will fall behind its neighbors, who are already setting up inter-agency protocols to expedite environmental review.

In recent years much has been written about smart growth. What we need in this economic downturn is a smart approach to reductions. Everyone understands that there will be plenty of pain to be shared throughout the state's programs. But with any proposal for cutbacks, we need to ask whether the supposed savings are real or illusory, and we need to insure that cutting back in one area does not cripple state initiatives in another.

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